DARWIN, INTELLIGENT DESIGN,
AND "OLD HUNDREDTH"
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Psalm 100
Matthew 25:31–46

"Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth."
Psalm 100:1 (NRSV)

Again I resume the long
lesson: how small a thing
can be pleasing, how little
in this hard world it takes
to satisfy the mind
and bring it to its rest. . . .

What more did I
think I wanted? Here is
what has always been.
Here is what will always
be. Even in me,
the Maker of all this
returns in rest, even
to the slightest of His works
a yellow leaf slowly
falling, and is pleased.

Wendell Berry
Given

Garrison Keillor's Thanksgiving editorial appeared in the *Tribune* last week. He made me laugh out loud with his opening reference to "macho cooking," the trend in the 1980s for men to venture into the kitchen, take cooking classes, swap recipes, and compete with one another, not on the playing field, but on stove top and in the oven, to make the most elegant soufflé or the best risotto in town. Keillor says, "I had a Harley Davidson food chopper and cheese grater," "a two stroke rotary-turbine garlic press in a holster on my belt." He got over it, he said, and instead of striving for world-class risotto, has returned to his first love, macaroni and cheese and chili, "the manna God gave

to Christian people in the wilderness." For Thanksgiving this year, Keillor will serve "pressed turkey loaf with instant mashed potatoes, canned cranberry, which is better than anything you can make yourself. And mince pie from the bakery with Reddi-Whip."

And then, as he frequently does, Keillor reversed his field and surprised me by quoting the 100th Psalm. He wrote:

> As the Psalmist said,
> It is God who hath made us, and not
> we ourselves. We are the people of his pasture.
> Come into his gates with thanksgiving.
> For the Lord is gracious,
> His mercy is everlasting,
> And his truth endureth from generation to generation.

He concluded, "In other words, get over it. Lighten up. It isn't about food."

By happy coincidence, Psalm 100 is the Psalter reading throughout the church this morning, the Sunday before Thanksgiving, that most American of holidays, the simplest, quietest, maybe the best: no gifts, parties, not much by way of decorations, and little, if any, of the frenzy and stress that will afflict some of us in the weeks ahead. Of course, around here, it is also the weekend of the big parade, when some of us stand on the church steps singing Christmas carols while Mickey Mouse rides by on a float. And we turn on our electric sheep, my very favorite moment in the church year.

Psalm 100 is a simple, elegant, and pure example of the very heart of our religion. It is an invitation to praise and thank the God who created us, and to whom we belong, for the simple but deeply profound reality that God is God, that God is good and merciful; an invitation to name it, quietly pray it, sing it, and shout it out loud—to make a joyful noise, to enter his gates with thanksgiving and his court with praise. It is the simple, elemental, and deeply profound human acknowledgement of the reality of God and the expression of gratitude and praise that is the heart of our faith.

After the Reformation, before there were hymns, the Psalms were sung in Reformed/Presbyterian worship. Old Hundredth, as it was known, was the favorite. The Pilgrims brought it with them on the Mayflower. The setting was written in 1561 by William Kethe, a Scottish refugee who fled persecution and landed in Europe. Kethe's lyrical and lovely text—"Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice; Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell"—was set to music by Louis

Bourgeois, a French musician, a follower of John Calvin whom Calvin hired to be the organist at St. Peter's in Geneva, where Calvin preached. Bourgeois busied himself setting the psalms to music and in the process wrote, for the One Hundredth Psalm, the tune that we sing weekly as the Doxology. One time Bourgeois was fooling around with some of his own tunes, which people had come to love, and the authorities in Geneva had him arrested and thrown in jail for "altering the psalms without a license." John Calvin himself had to intercede to have Bourgeois released. There's something in that, I suppose, about musicians and ministers messing with tradition.

It is the oldest English hymn, Old Hundredth: "All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. . . . Know that the Lord is God indeed; without our aid he did us make." God made us. We belong to God. Our best and highest and most authentically human act is thanking and praising God, making a joyful noise.

God made us: the basic affirmation of faith. How God made us is another matter. Theology and science have been in conflict somewhere or another for centuries — since Copernicus and Galileo at least. In our day, the conflict emerges around Darwinism, evolution, creationism and its current expression, "intelligent design." The venues of the conflict are school boards and courts. One hundred and fifty years ago, Charles Darwin, after exhaustive study, revolutionized the way science thinks by suggesting that life has evolved from simple forms to more complex forms through a process of natural selection over millions and millions of years. The reaction from the religious community was immediate, strong, and negative. It seemed like evolution contradicted the Bible and therefore was incompatible with religious faith. The issue was joined publicly in the famous Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925. Two things happened as a result. Much of the scientific community began to distrust and dismiss religion. And within the religious community there was a split between those who regarded science as a threat to faith and thus something that needed to be discredited, and those who welcomed scientific research and discovery as a way to learn and appreciate even more the wonder of God's creation.

Intelligent design is the most recent attempt to get religion back into the classroom, to "drive a wedge," to use the words employed by its advocates. The intelligent design argument is that evolution is merely a theory, unproven, and that public school students should be exposed in science class to the idea that there is an intelligent design, therefore an intelligent designer, namely God. In Dover, Pennsylvania, the local school board mandated that Intelligent Design be included in the curriculum, was taken to court, and was recently voted out of

office, which prompted Pat Robertson to predict that God would punish the entire community. In Kansas, the State Board of Education voted again to include intelligent design in high school science curriculum, in the process redefining science in a way that has offended the entire academic community. Even the President weighed in and said students should be exposed to both evolution and intelligent design.

Well, why not? What's wrong with the idea? What's wrong is that intelligent design is not science. Science is neutral; science observes, sorts, sifts evidence, tests, and then puts forward theories, conclusions based on evidence. Intelligent design begins with a premise and a conclusion that cannot be tested. That doesn't mean it is not true, just that it isn't science.

In a wonderful essay in *Time* last week, Eric Cornell, a Nobel Prize winner in physics, put it this way. He asked, Why is the sky blue? There are two answers. One has to do with Rayleigh scattering of varying light wave lengths which produce the color blue—the scientific answer. The second answer, Dr. Cornell says, is that God wants the sky to be blue—the religious answer. Neither answer disproves the other. Intelligent design, this scientist says, is an interesting notion, as a theological idea, exciting. But it's not science. It belongs in a religion class, not a science class.

Science, I believe, does not threaten religion, ever. Science supplements religion. Dr. Cornell says microscopes and telescopes are windows into the mind of God. What a lovely thought.

Every credible scientific organization in the country opposes the inclusion of intelligent design in science curriculum. But at the same time, scientists and theologians are meeting together and talking together as never before, and emerging from the new conversation is a sense that the two disciplines need each other. Religion needs science to discover the "what and how" of creation. Science needs religion to probe the "why." Albert Einstein put it this way: "Religion without science is blind. Science without religion is lame."

One of the most distressing developments from the perspective of the scientific community is the politicization of science, the subjecting of science to political ideology, currently under the influence of the Religious Right. In issue after issue, science is either ignored or dismissed: the severe restrictions on funding for critical stem cell research; reductions in support for birth control and family planning; the accessibility of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS; opposition to needle exchanges , a proven way to combat hepatitis and AIDS; the

refusal to acknowledge the reality of global warming or how tobacco subsidies relate to lung disease; and, most recently, the decision of the Federal Drug Administration not to release the morning-after pill for over-the-counter sales—which would reduce unwanted pregnancies and therefore the number of abortions—before its own scientists concluded their study and in direct opposition to their recommendation. The "Fiasco at the FDA" the *Tribune* called it in an editorial yesterday. One recent book calls this a "War on Science."

Francis Collins is the Director of the National Genome Research Institute, a consummate scientist and a man of faith. In a *New York Times* feature article on evolution and intelligent design, he told a reporter, "I see no conflict between what the Bible tells me about God and what science tells me about nature. If God chose to use the mechanism of evolution to create you and me, who are we to say that wasn't an absolutely elegant plan?"

Collins's own story is fascinating. He was a nonbeliever, an agnostic on the way to atheism. After he completed his doctorate in physics, he went on to medical school. He remembers treating a woman dying of heart disease. "She was very clear about her faith and she looked me in the eye and she said, 'What do you believe?'" He recalled he sort of stammered out, "I am not sure."

His patient died in her faith, and he began to think about religion, for the first time, as a scientist. He became a believer. Scientific discovery, the amazing tracking of human DNA in the Genome Project, Collins says, has caused him to believe in God, God's creativity, God's goodness, even more deeply. Scientific discovery is, Collins says, an act of worship.

One of the thinkers who spoke to Collins was the late C. S. Lewis and his book *Mere Christianity,* an accessible exploration of basic Christian faith. *Time* magazine called Lewis the "hottest theologian of 2005." A distinguished English scholar, author of the Narnia series, Lewis came to faith himself midlife, and he wrote about it elegantly. In a little book on the psalms, Lewis raises the interesting issue of why the Bible keeps insisting that we praise and thank God. Lewis said it is almost as if the Bible thinks God is an insecure lover who needs to be constantly assured that he's wonderful and loved. That's not it at all, Lewis wrote. God doesn't need to be thanked, praised, and worship. We are the ones who need to thank God, praise God, worship God. "Praise," he said, "is almost inner health made audible."

Most of us, I suppose, were taken to church as children and didn't have much say in the matter. We went, sang the hymns, prayed the

prayers, because we had to. Then, when we no longer had to, most of us stopped for a while. It was an important point in our faith journey when it finally dawned on us that we need to worship and praise and thank God, that we are incomplete without it, that we are never more fully alive, fully human, than when we acknowledge and thank the one who created us.

“God,” Lewis wrote, “is that object to admire which is to be most awake.”

> Know that the Lord is God.
> It is he that made us
> [the King James version adds for emphasis “and not we ourselves”];
> We are his . . . his people, the sheep of his pasture.

That is the very best news of all. It is God that made us; we are his. You and I belong to God. Our identity is dependent on nothing external. We are not cogs on a wheel, units in a political process; we are not a market, consumers, targets for advertising. We are not a product of the money we make, our jobs, the schools from which we graduated, the clubs to which we belong. We—at the very core of our being—belong to God. We are God’s people, the sheep of his pasture.

It is a lovely moment when we bring newborn infants into our worship service for their baptism. And it is a profound and powerful moment when the minister says the baby’s name and then, “You have been sealed by the Spirit in your baptism, and you belong to Jesus Christ forever.”

The old Heidelberg catechism asks, “What is your only comfort in life and death?” and answers, “My only comfort is that I belong, body and soul, in life and death, not to myself, but to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ.”

The promise of Psalm 100, we believe, is wondrously confirmed in the birth, which we soon celebrate, the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In that event, the steadfast love of God, the truth that endures for all generations, is wonderfully given.

And you and I are left, as the great theologian Karl Barth put it, like children on Christmas morning, surrounded by gifts we did nothing to deserve, our hearts brimming with gratitude.

It is the week of Thanksgiving, a time to ponder all we have been given: to enter God's gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise, to give thanks to God and to bless God's name, for

- the beauty of this world, the gorgeous colors of autumn, the pale moon on a surprisingly cold night rising over our lake
- the startling symmetry and amazing complexity of nature
- the abundance and goodness of the food we eat
- the freedom and security we enjoy
- the love of our dear ones and friends
- the gift of our lives.
- the love of God in Jesus Christ, from which nothing will every separate us

Make a joyful noise to the Lord
All people that on earth do dwell;
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

Amen.